



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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**NOTE**

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Subject : Council Conclusions on Democracy Support in the EU's External Relations  
– Towards Increased Coherence and Effectiveness

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At the meeting on 17 November 2009, the General Affairs and External Relations Council adopted the Conclusions set out in the Annex to this note.

**Council Conclusions on  
Democracy Support in the EU's External Relations  
– Towards Increased Coherence and Effectiveness**

1. The European Union, as a global actor and the world's largest donor, is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. One of the objectives of EU external action is to develop and consolidate democracy and the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The EU is committed to improving the coherence and effectiveness of its support to democracy. The Council therefore decides to adopt an EU Agenda for action on Democracy Support in EU external relations.
  
2. The EU and its Member States act in support of democracy drawing on strong parliamentary traditions, based on the role of national Parliaments and regional and local assemblies in Member States and that of the European Parliament. The Council recognises that democracy cannot be imposed from the outside. The EU remains committed to the principles of ownership of development strategies and programmes by partner countries. Locally driven processes can be supported by an appropriate mix of financial and political instruments tailored to the specific situation of each country. EU democracy support should therefore aim at assisting efforts and strengthening the capacity of Governments, Parliaments and other state institutions, political actors, civil society organisations and other actors. EU efforts aim at contributing to sustainable development, respect for human rights, democratic governance, security, poverty reduction and gender equality.

3. The EU has an extensive array of instruments at its disposal. These include an important number of dialogue instruments that can address elements related to democracy support: policies, action under EU human rights guidelines, financial instruments, election observation missions, ESDP missions, and action in multilateral fora. The EU does not intend to introduce new conditionality for EU development aid. There is no need to renegotiate existing norms, values and central principles as to what constitutes the building blocks of democracy, nor to set out new policies. The Council, however, affirms that there is room for improvement in how existing EU policies are implemented, and that they should be applied more consistently and effectively in order to work better together as mutually enhancing parts of a coherent whole.
  
4. Acknowledging the multidimensional, complex and long term nature of democracy building processes, the Council agrees that there is a need for a broader and more coherent approach. The Council emphasizes the need for increased coherence, complementarity and coordination throughout the full range of actions in support of democracy: among different actors as well as thematic and geographical instruments for democracy support both at the country level and at headquarters level. This should start from the country analysis stage and continue through planning, programming, implementation and evaluation of EU support, in order to achieve an appropriate mix of instruments according to the situation in a given country, and should be guided by dialogue with partner countries as appropriate. The EU is committed to acting in genuine partnership with third countries, international and regional organizations, and civil society.

5. The Council welcomes the submission of the Joint Paper - Commission/Council General Secretariat on Democracy Building in EU External Relations and of its recommendations.
6. An EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support in EU External Relations is set out in the Annex. It is based on existing and relevant policies and instruments and takes into account work carried out in relevant Council working parties.
7. The Agenda shall apply to actions undertaken under all existing EU policies and instruments for democracy support in third countries within the framework of EU development policy and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).
8. The Council invites the responsible EU institutions, in cooperation with Member States, to implement the attached EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support in EU External Relations in all regions, and to report back to the Council in 2010 on the progress achieved in its implementation. It also invites the responsible EU institutions to include in their progress report a proposed list of pilot countries for more specific follow-up. Once such a list and the proposed follow-up are agreed, a course of action and a timetable for implementation should be drawn up in partnership with the countries concerned.

**EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support  
in EU External Relations**

**I. Introduction**

Democratic and participatory governance and the free will of the people can best assure the right of men and women to live and raise their children in dignity, freedom from hunger and from the fear of violence, oppression or injustice. As recognized in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Democracy is inextricably linked to the full respect of all human rights, including gender equality.

The EU can play an important role in supporting States and civil society, including human rights defenders and democracy activists, who wish to move towards greater freedom, equity, justice and prosperity. The EU does so based on the effective implementation of the EU guidelines on Human Rights, including the EU guidelines on Human Rights Defenders.

Though democratic systems may vary in forms and shape, democracy has evolved into a universal value. Democracy ensures that rulers can be held accountable for their actions. Governments with democratic legitimacy must deliver on the basic rights and needs of people or they risk losing legitimacy and public support. The EU remains committed to the principles of ownership of development strategies and programmes by the citizens of partner countries. Locally driven processes and initiatives should be supported by an appropriate mix of financial and political instruments tailored to the specific situation of each country, as long as such initiatives are compatible with international human rights standards. The aim of **The EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support in EU External Relations** is to improve the coherence and the effectiveness of EU democracy support, not to introduce new conditionality for EU development aid.

## **II. Main common values, norms and central principles**

The following common values, norms and central principles form the basis of **The EU Agenda for Action on Democracy Support in EU External Relations**:

- Human rights and democracy are inextricably connected. Only in a democracy can individuals fully realize their human rights; only when human rights are respected can democracy flourish.
- Progress in the protection of human rights, good governance and democratization is fundamental for poverty reduction and sustainable development.

- While there is no single model of democracy, democracies share certain common features. These include respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the principle of non-discrimination, which provides that everyone is entitled to enjoyment of all human rights without discrimination as to race, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, birth or other status. Democracy should ensure the rights of all, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, of indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups.
- Democracy, democratic governance, development and respect for all human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political and social – are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.
- The ability of men and women to participate on equal terms in political life and in decision-making is a prerequisite of genuine democracy. The promotion of gender equality and women’s rights is not only crucial in itself but is a fundamental human right and a question of social justice, as well as being instrumental in achieving all the MDGs.
- The EU is committed to the principle of ownership of development strategies and programmes by partner countries.
- EU democracy support should include a special focus on the role of elected representatives and political parties and institutions, independent media and civil society. The EU support should take into account the full electoral cycle and not focus on ad hoc electoral support only.

- The EU acknowledges the essential oversight role of democratically elected citizens' representatives. Therefore it encourages an increased involvement of national assemblies, Parliaments and local authorities in domestic policy-making.
- The accountability of leaders and public officials to citizens is as essential element of democracy. In this context, the EU reiterates its support for the efforts to combat corruption.
- The EU supports the broad participation of all stakeholders in countries' development and encourages all parts of society to take part in democracy building. NGOs and other non-state actors of partner countries in particular play a vital role as promoters of democracy, social justice and human rights.
- The EU partnerships and dialogues with third countries will continue to promote the common values of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, peace, democracy, good governance, gender equality, the rule of law, solidarity and justice.

- Political dialogue is an important way in which to further development objectives and other external relations objectives. In the framework of the political dialogue, respect for democratic governance, human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law should be regularly assessed with a view to forming a shared understanding and identifying supporting measures. This dialogue has an important preventive dimension and aims to ensure these principles are upheld.
- A holistic approach on governance entails mainstreaming of human rights and fundamental freedoms, democratic governance and rule of law to all policy sectors, i.a. by implementing the EU guidelines for human rights dialogues, and by including human rights, democracy and the rule of law in discussions with third countries, in programming discussions and in country strategy papers.

### **III. Further action needs to be taken in the following areas:**

#### **(1) A country-specific approach**

Democracy building processes take place in a variety of contexts, including in countries emerging from or threatened by conflict or in a situation of fragility. The type and level of EU engagement as well as the best mix of instruments to be used will be determined by the context of each country. EU action should be based on a deep understanding of the local context.

The country analysis should draw on existing analytical tools developed by various EU actors including the governance profiles for ACP countries, Heads of Mission reports, reports by EU Special Representatives and human rights fact sheets. It should also take into account existing national analysis and action plans. EU Electoral Observation Mission's recommendations or analytical tools developed by external actors should also be considered when relevant. A country specific analysis addressing systematically the issue of democracy support should be built into Country Strategic Papers building on the experience and lessons learned from using the governance profiles for ACP-countries. Particular attention should be given to the specific need of fragile and post-conflict situations.

## **(2) Dialogue and partnership**

Building true partnerships based on dialogue and consultation enhances ownership of democracy building processes and elements of democratic governance should, wherever possible, be treated as an item in its own right in EU dialogues with partner countries.

A number of dialogues are often ongoing with partner countries at various levels with aspects pertaining to democracy building processes<sup>1</sup>. Efforts should be made to use these different dialogues in a more coherent, consistent and coordinated manner, and best practices, assessments and experiences in this regard should be shared. The EU should continue its established practice of looking for innovative ways to involve civil society, political parties, the media and other non-governmental political players in the dialogues.

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. political dialogues, local troika dialogues, human rights dialogues, human rights sub-committees, JLS sub-committees, Cotonou Art. 8 dialogues, PCA dialogues, Strategic Partnership Action Plan dialogues, programming dialogues, etc.

**(3) EU coherence and coordination**

The EU is committed to increasing the coherence, effectiveness and development impact of both EU internal and external policies. In EU External Relations enhancing coherence between different actors and instruments is needed both at headquarters level and at country level. This should start from the country analysis stage and continue from the planning to the implementation phase. It also calls for increased coherence and coordination between programming instruments and guidelines for both thematic and country and regional strategies for a broad agenda on democracy support as well as a coherent use of tools to assess elements of democracy support, and to monitor and evaluate them.

**(4) Mainstreaming**

Some progress has been made in taking forward the EU commitments set out in the European Consensus on Development and in the Guidelines on Human Rights to mainstream human rights, democracy, democratic governance, and the rule of law in all EU external relations activities, in particular with regard to the ACP countries through the 2006 Governance Initiative. The important contribution of ESDP missions and operations to democracy building processes and the rule of law, and the key role played by EU Special Representatives in promoting democracy as well as the role of EU Election Observation Missions should also be noted.

The EU should continue to improve mainstreaming in this area in line with existing commitments, both from an institutional perspective and in policy and geographical/thematic instruments.

(5) **International cooperation**

The EU should intensify its efforts to promote democracy-related norms and elements through its activities within international organizations. The EU should continue to promote the effective implementation of the commitments and obligations undertaken within and through the fora in which EU Member States participate, including the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the OSCE. The EU and its Member States should intensify cooperation in these and other international fora, including cooperation within the Community of Democracies.

Dialogue with regional and international organizations and support to sub-regional organizations are vital to democracy building processes. The EU will continue to support initiatives in support of democracy in other parts of the world, including through the Eastern Partnership, the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Union for the Mediterranean, the EU-Central Asia Strategy, the implementation of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy and its Partnership on Democratic Governance and Human Rights. The EU will also continue to support other regional initiatives, such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), the OAS Charter for Democracy and Peer Mechanism and the Organisation de la Francophonie.

The EU should explore possibilities to further strengthen its dialogue and support to regional and sub-regional organizations' work on democracy support including by examining the possibilities for setting up interregional platforms for exchange in this area.

(6) **Visibility**

More visibility should be given to democracy issues in EU annual reports on development cooperation and human rights and in other relevant country reports. These should, where possible, include a separate section on democracy support. While visibility should not be an end in itself, promoting transparency and visibility increases the impact of EU democracy support.

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